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SUBJECT: CHAD ELECTORAL PROCESS: DESPITE PROGRESS, DIVIDED
OPPOSITION THREATENS ELECTORAL BOYCOTT

REFTEL: NDJAMENA 241

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Chad's electoral reform process took two steps forward and one step back last week. Both the government and opposition sides agreed on their lists of 15 names each for members of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI). The CENI then elected July 16 by consensus Ngarmadjal Gami, a teacher by profession, to be its president. The opposition then threatened July 17 to completely pull out of the electoral process over a controversial but not crucial element in the Charter of Political Parties passed by the Parliament. The Prime Minister convoked the Electoral Reform Committee (ERP) July 18 to urge restraint and encourage the opposition to continue to contribute to the process. We are encouraged by senior-level GOC involvement to resolve this issue, but any attempt by the opposition to use this issue as an excuse to boycott the election, while clearly in character for this increasingly feckless lot, would be disastrous for Chad's future as a state. If the opposition does not climb down from this reckless position, it should expect to find us, along with the French, the EU, the Germans and others, ready to condemn their evident lack of political integrity. END SUMMARY.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION ESTABLISHED

2. (SBU) The legal and administrative preparations for Chad to stand up an independent electoral body continue following recommendations by the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF) to break the legislative logjam that were then formalized by Chadian President Deby in Decree 621.

3. (SBU) Chad's Electoral Reform Committee (ERP) released July 10 the list of the thirty names of those who had been selected to be members of the new Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI). The thirty members represented fifteen persons each from the government side and the opposition side. A July 13 presidential decree confirmed their status as members of the CENI.

4. (SBU) Brief controversy followed July 15 with newly appointed CENI members disagreeing on the qualifications necessary for candidates for the post of president of the CENI. CENI members, along with Electoral Reform Committee, had resolved their differences and July 16 the 30-member CENI chose by consensus Ngarmadjal Gami to be CENI President. The international community

-- AU, EU, French, Germans, Swiss, USG, -- acts as observers to the electoral reform process and diplomatic interlocutors expressed their general satisfaction with the progress to date.

MOMENTUM HALTED BY OPPOSITION PROTEST

15. (SBU) The positive momentum did not last long. Opposition parliamentarians, reacting negatively to the Charter of Political Parties passed by the National Assembly, threatened to pull out of the entire process -- the August 13, 2007 accord to bring opposition parties into the political dialogue -- thus scuttling July 17 plans to confirm the CENI by a Supreme Court-administered oath. The opposition was protesting the removal of Article 33 from the charter which had prohibited elected deputies (parliamentarians) from switching parties.

16. (SBU) While Article 33 was questionably constitutional, the GOC had supported its inclusion in the draft passed by the Council of Ministers and forwarded to the National Assembly. There was an attempt to gain consensus between the government and opposition deputies in support of Article 33, but that failed to materialize when the charter was approved without the article causing the opposition's threat of a pull-out. Opposition members supported Article 33 as a means of preventing the government from "buying" support in the National Assembly.

17. (SBU) The Prime Minister called the ERC members and the First Vice President of the National Assembly to a July 18 meeting to discuss the situation and appeal to the opposition for calm and understanding. All parties are now waiting for the opposition's response, as to whether they will hew to the newly passed charter or

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completely withdraw from the electoral reform process.

BIOGRAPHY OF CENI PRESIDENT

18. (SBU) Ngarmadjal Gami was the General Secretary of the Teachers' Trade Union from 2000 until April 2009 when he was nominated as member of the governmental Economic, Social and Cultural Council, a constitutionally created body membership in which conveys prestige and monetary benefit. A teacher by profession who trained at the National School for Primary Teachers, Ngarmadjal is a Christian from southern Chad.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) There was momentary hope for the administrative side of Chad's electoral process with the establishment of the CENI last week and its consensus choice of a president. But the opposition's boycott threat calls the whole process into question. We are encouraged by senior-level GOC involvement to resolve this issue, but any attempt by the opposition to use this issue as an excuse to boycott the election, while clearly in character for this increasingly feckless lot, would be dangerous for Chad's future as a state. If the opposition does not climb down from this reckless position, it should expect to find us, along with the French, the EU, the Germans and others, ready to condemn their evident lack of political integrity. END COMMENT.

110. (U) Minimize considered.

NIGRO